

CHANGES IN THE NC HISPANIC/LATINO POPULATION, 1990 TO 1994 -- with implications for public health

Health care planners and providers need current population estimates to decide the best use of their financial and human resources. These estimates are essential for adapting or expanding services to meet specific health needs, and for developing programs that are based in the culture and language of a population. However, good estimates are hard to find for the Hispanic/Latino population in North Carolina. The 1990 census may have significantly undercounted this population. More importantly, the census is five years old, and there have been large increases in this population in many local areas.

This report is an attempt to provide some evidence of the growth in the North Carolina Hispanic/Latino population. It is difficult to make population projections for groups with relatively small numbers, such as the Hispanic/Latino population. This report does not provide projections or comprehensive estimates. Rather, it describes what has happened since the census, and includes additional data to more accurately describe the population changes. Even though the existing data are limited in many ways, some of the data may be helpful for program planning and resource allocation.

Terminology

The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are often used interchangeably. These words refer to people of Hispanic origin, who are generally Spanish-speaking and often identify culturally with Latin America. Both terms are used by people of Spanish descent. Hispanic is a term coined by the government, but it is also commonly used by many people of Spanish origin. The term Latino is increasing in usage; it reflects cultural origins in Latin America, regardless of ethnic heritage. In this report, Hispanic is used predominately since the data were coded using that term.

While some terminology is needed to discuss the group as a whole, it is important to recognize the variation within groups of people. Hispanics/Latinos may include: Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans; people from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Central or South America; and people with other Spanish origins. Language and cultural differences may arise due to age, education, and socioeconomic and immigration status (documented or not). Other factors include length of time in the United States, extent of adaptation to the "Anglo" culture, and urban versus rural residence.

Background

In 1994, the Office of Minority Health and the Linguistic Committee estimated the number of Hispanics/Latinos to determine needs for interpreter services (Lopez, 1994). The focus was on those who speak limited English. This was done with the 1990 census counts, 1993 estimates of migrant farm workers, and a factor for dependents of migrant workers. Using